



## More Edinburgh services announced



*Three new Edinburgh-London services are being added on Sundays as part of a timetable shake-up in December. This follows the successful launch of 42 additional Edinburgh-London services per week in May.*

Virgin Trains is introducing four new weekend services for Edinburgh in the latest shake-up of its east coast timetable.

Three new departures connecting Edinburgh to Newcastle and London are being introduced on Sunday to coincide with one of the busiest days for demand.

And a late Friday night service from Edinburgh to Newcastle at 22.01 will allow for a later night out in the Scottish capital. This will call at Dunbar, Berwick-upon-Tweed,

Alnmouth and Morpeth.

The new timetable takes effect from December 11 and will add 19 new services, 13,000 additional seats per week and dozens of extra stops to the network. It comes as Virgin Trains nears completion of a total overhaul of its entire train fleet. The development follows on from the launch of 42 additional services linking Edinburgh to Newcastle and London in May and ahead of the introduction of the state-of-the-art fleet of Azuma trains in 2018, which will transform journeys on the east coast route. New services to Stirling and Sunderland were launched in 2015 after Virgin Trains took over the east coast route.

David Horne, Managing Director for Virgin Trains on the east coast said: "This is a great boost to our customers travelling along the east coast and especially to and from Edinburgh, Leeds and London.

"Having invested heavily into the customer experience, upgrading our train interiors and launching a new on board streaming service, the two journeys will fly by."

Virgin Trains is investing £140m into its east coast route as part of its commitment to the eight year franchise. It has already invested £20m in refurbished carriages and provided a Netflix-style streaming service as part of its customer service improvements.

*Virgin Trains comments on the announcement that the new West Coast franchise will partner with HS2.*

Virgin Trains acknowledges the Department for Transport's announcement that the new West Coast franchise will partner with HS2. The DfT has said that the new franchise will run from April 2019, and include the initial operation of high speed services. The current West Coast franchise ends in March 2018.

Virgin, in partnership with Stagecoach, has run the West Coast line for almost 20 years. In that time passenger numbers have almost tripled, thanks to a relentless focus on customer service and satisfaction.

When Virgin took over the franchise, the West Coast was a struggling rail service which many doubted could be turned into a success – some dubbed it 'mission impossible'. Virgin Trains brought in a new fleet of rolling stock – the iconic Pendolinos, a new ethos centred around the customer and high frequency timetables which saw trains between London and Birmingham / Manchester every twenty minutes.

Over the years Virgin Trains has consistently outperformed competitors and innovated continuously for the benefit of customers. The train operator has led the industry with initiatives such as the introduction of automatic compensation for delayed passengers, m-tickets across all routes and BEAM, a revolutionary on-board content system that allows passengers to watch TV and films for free on their own devices.

Patrick McCall, co-chairman of Virgin Trains, said: "We're immensely proud of what Virgin Trains has achieved over the last two decades and the unique and unrivalled focus on the customer we've brought to communities along the line. There are clearly huge advantages in having continuity of service during HS2's critical enabling works – both up to the start of the new franchise in 2019 and beyond.

"We firmly believe the franchise system has brought unparalleled success to the UK rail industry, with public-private partnerships between Government and franchisees like Virgin Trains delivering success, innovation and growth that would simply never have happened under public ownership."

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## Thousands apply to drive Virgin's Azuma trains



*More than 15,000 people have applied to drive the state-of-the art Azuma train following the biggest driver recruitment programme on the east coast route since the 1980s.*

More than 15,000 candidates have applied to drive Virgin Trains' revolutionary new Azuma following the biggest recruitment drive on the east coast route since the 1980s.

The overwhelming response, equivalent to nearly 200 applications per post, comes as Virgin Trains gears up for the launch of the new fleet in 2018.

The first of 78 new drivers will work from depots between London and Edinburgh and

are due to start a year-long development programme in January.

The Virgin Trains talent team has now started sifting through the thousands of applications after the closing date last Friday.

A spokesperson for Virgin Trains said: "We have received a huge amount of interest in this fantastic opportunity at Virgin Trains on its east coast route. We're really excited that so many people want to come and join our fabulous company! The Talent team are working hard to process and update all of the applications we received. Those who have been successful in getting through the first stages of the process will be invited to attend a selection day which will include a variety of assessments and exercises that will bring the best talent into our business."

When it launches in 2018, the 65 Azumas, built in the UK by Hitachi, will be one of the most advanced trains on the UK's rail network.

Virgin Trains has sought to broaden the pool of applicants, challenging those who have never considered driving a train to think about what the career would offer.

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## Virgin Trains introduces regular prison recruitment fairs

**West Coast operator doubled target for employing people with convictions**



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revolving door syndrome of reoffending.

The programme was announced after a recruitment fair in HMP Addiewell and has been welcomed by Scotland's Justice Secretary Michael Matheson.

Virgin Trains has been actively recruiting people with criminal convictions since 2013 when founder Sir Richard Branson challenged Virgin businesses and the wider business community to help reduce reoffending.

In 2014 the operator undertook to employ 12 people with convictions as part of the contract awarded by the Department for Transport to run services on the west coast. It currently has 27 people working in the business who were recruited through this programme.

Kathryn Wildman, who leads recruitment on the west coast route, said Virgin Trains had incorporated prison recruitment fairs into its normal recruitment programme after they proved successful in sourcing talented candidates for jobs with the company.

Speaking after a recruitment fair held in HMP Addiewell earlier this week, she said: "We started this process three years ago with relatively modest ambitions. But we've been really pleased with the calibre of candidates we've managed to attract through prison recruitment events and our wider ex offenders programme and so we've decided to incorporate these into our regular calendar of recruitment events.

"This isn't just about helping society and giving people a chance to turn their lives around. It's hiring the best people no matter what their background is. We'd urge other employers who might be thinking about this to give it a go."

Virgin Trains has established partnerships with HM Prison Service, the Scottish Prison Service and private prison operators, all of whom work with inmates who are nearing the end of their sentence to identify employment opportunities.

Scotland's Justice Secretary Michael Matheson said: "Supporting people into work when they come out of custody is an essential part of their reintegration, and helps to reduce the chances of them offending again. We are working with the public sector, including the Scottish Prison Service, and private businesses to make it easier for people with convictions to find employment. Virgin Trains are very supportive of this work and I am delighted to hear of this latest partnership with HMP Addiewell to tackle the barriers which prevent people from turning their lives around."

In 2015, Virgin Trains began operating services on the east coast and is looking to expand this programme to include that route.

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## Scottish passengers can book Virgin Trains tickets six months ahead



*We've doubled the booking horizon for customers travelling on either the east coast or west coast routes from Scotland to London, making it easier to plan journeys and get great deals.*

We've extended our booking horizon on the west coast route between Glasgow and London to six months in advance for weekday tickets, from the industry standard of three months. We know that passengers, particularly our leisure travellers, want time to plan holidays and book for events in advance, and we wanted to provide customers with the opportunity to secure great deals. Earlier this year we extended the booking horizon on our east coast route to six months. So wherever in Scotland

you're travelling from it will be easier to book ahead and get the best deal.

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